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Amerikanische Aussen- und Sicherheitspolitik unter Präsident Johnson
im Dilemma zwischen Great Society und Vietnam, 1963-1969

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Johnson's "Short-Tether" Policy Towards India

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Introduction

The U.S. had provided India with food through programs of the PL 480 since the 1950s. By the time Johnson became President, the amount of aid had increased greatly, rendering India more and more dependent on American wheat. Johnson decided to change this tendency by applying pressure to force India to change its agricultural policies. Even during the period of severe drought in 1965-67, Johnson only accepted to sign short-term agreements, creating enormous pressure. I would like to analyze the way Johnson changed U.S. food aid policy towards India, as well as the motivations and the results of this policy. What was the rationale behind Johnson's "short-tether" policy? Why was the policy towards India so radically changed in 1965? What factors influenced Johnson's decision, and what were the results?

Much has been written about food aid for India during the drought years 1965-67, and yet there is still an open debate regarding Johnson's motivations for the "short-tether" policy. Some authors claim that it was a reaction to criticism of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, while others state that documents give no proof of this.

M. Srinvas Chary^{1[1]} suggests that "although not publicly stated, President Johnson made food aid conditional on the Indian government's support of the U.S. war effort in Vietnam"^{2[2]}. He observes that Johnson tightened the "short-tether" policy just after Gandhi, during a trip to Moscow, had publicly criticized U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Sumit Ganguly^{3[3]} also considers the "short-tether" policy as a reaction to the July 1966 Moscow communiqué criticizing U.S. involvement in Vietnam. From this perspective, the policy failed, for criticism continued.

J.W. Bjorkman^{4[4]} distinguishes between the self-help strategy, which had sensible objectives, and the "short-tether" policy, that was linked to political events, especially to criticism of the war in Vietnam, and discredited sensible U.S. policies - Johnson's excessive attention is to blame.

^[1] Chary, M. Srinivas. *The Eagle and the Peacock: U.S. Foreign Policy Toward India Since Independence*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995.

^[2] Chary, p.124.

^[3] Ganguly, Sumit. "U.S.-Indian Relations During the Lyndon Johnson Era." in Harold A. Gould and Sumit Ganguly(eds). *The Hope and the Reality: U.S.-Indian Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992: 81-90.

^[4] Bjorkman, James Warner. "Public Law 480 and the Policies of Self-Help and Short Tether: Indo-American Relations, 1965-68." in Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, eds. *The Regional Imperative: The Administration of U.S. Foreign Policy Towards South Asian States Under Presidents Johnson and Nixon*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1980: 201-262.

H.W. Brands published two different views on this issue. In his earlier book,^{5[5]} he suggests that Johnson took criticism on Vietnam personally, and reacted to the Moscow communiqué by tightening the short-tether on PL 480, even though he never publicly admitted it. In a later book,^{6[6]} Brands suggests that the India-Pakistan war also played a role. The administration never officially linked food aid to a settlement on Kashmir, but Brands implies that the "short-tether" policy was tightened in 1965 because of this conflict, which caused India to spend too much on arms. This policy was successful, for it led India on its way towards self-sufficiency, although U.S.-Indian relations suffered.

Carolyn Castore^{7[7]} explains that Johnson asked for a review of PL 480 towards India in 1964 and a debate followed within the administration regarding a new agreement, as well as the evaluation of India's progress. She states that documents reveal no reaction to the Moscow communiqué criticizing Vietnam, and links the "short-tether" policy to Indian agricultural production and the impact of food aid on U.S. wheat harvest and prices. U.S. pressure was successful, for it achieved most formal objectives, while the political costs are difficult to calculate.

Marcel Bearth^{8[8]} recalls that India was just an example of a worldwide threat of famine and the only possible solution was the implementation of self-help measures. He suggests that American wheat prices also played a role in Johnson's policy. Bearth states that documents give no proof of a reaction to criticism on Vietnam or a link with the Kashmir war. The "short-tether" policy was certainly a bitter method, but it gave an important contribution to leading India towards self-sufficiency.

Dennis Kux^{9[9]} presents the views of several people who were involved with Johnson's aid policy towards India at that time. He agrees with the opinion of most of them, that is that Johnson's motivation was to exert pressure to ensure the implementation of the new policies, while Vietnam was only one of the other factors that influenced the president's decision. Johnson ultimately achieved his goal, for India could later produce enough food, but Indo-American relations suffered greatly from this policy.

^{5[5]} Brands, H.W. *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.

^{6[6]} Brands, H.W. *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

^{7[7]} Castore, Carolyn. "The United States and India: The Use of Food to Apply Economic Pressure - 1965-67." in Sidney Weintraub, ed. *Economic Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy: Implications of Case Studies from the Johnson Administration*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982: 129-53.

^{8[8]} Bearth, Marcel. *Weizen, Waffen und Kredite für den indischen Subkontinent: Die amerikanische Südasienpolitik unter Präsident Johnson im Dilemma zwischen Indien und Pakistan, 1963-1969*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990.

^{9[9]} Kux, Dennis. *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-1991*. Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1992.

Baldev Raj Nayar^{10[10]} published a study of the Indian economy, explaining Nehru's strategy of emphasis on industry, which neglected agriculture. He presents a different perspective, providing useful background information which demonstrates that the policy changes encouraged by Johnson were really needed, even from the Indian point of view.

The authors mentioned above focus on different aspects of the "short-tether" policy which I would like to consider in order to present my own view on this subject. In this paper I will analyze Johnson's change in the implementation of PL 480, the objectives of the "short-tether" policy, the role of different factors, including Vietnam and domestic issues, and the results of this policy.

1. PL 480 - Food Aid for India

India's problem with food supplies goes back long before Johnson became President. In the early 1950s, President Truman sent U.S. wheat to India and succeeded in avoiding famine, although long congressional debates caused delays that generated resentment among the Indians.

President Eisenhower found it important to support India, so that it would not turn Communist; in 1954, Public Law 480 was established, that is a new agricultural commodity bill, allowing the U.S. government to dispose of surplus farm products in return for blocked rupees, became law. At that time the U.S. had enough grain in storage to feed its whole population for almost two years, creating large storage costs while in other parts of the world people went hungry. The new law, also called the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, seemed to provide a solution for both problems at once. However, PL 480 also served other purposes. First, it was intended to create new markets for American products in countries that would not be able to buy them. In practice, the American government paid American farmers to sell crops to India. In addition to this, it provided business for ship-owners and maritime unions, since it required that at least half of all PL 480 goods be transported in American bottoms. Therefore, this act did not only have a humanitarian objective and since it was supported by farmers and those involved in the transport industry, it had a special treatment among the foreign aid proposals in Congress.

The Kennedy Administration allowed a major increase in economic assistance, including an agricultural program with the aim of improving farm

^{10[10]}Nayar, Baldev Raj. *The Modernization Imperative and Indian Planning*. Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1972.

output, and PL 480 food assistance. As the amount of aid became increasingly larger, Congress found it more and more difficult to approve any additional aid and India was unpopular among many of its members.

President Johnson was no longer willing to continue such large amounts of aid and decided to change U.S. policy in a radical way, conditioning food aid on economic performance. During the first year and a half of his presidency, food aid was assured by the four-year PL 480 program approved in 1960. After this program expired, in September 1964, Johnson signed a one year food accord. In the spring of 1965, India asked for a two-year program; Johnson, however, refused to allow a routine approval and announced that he would personally decide on new aid until the Congress vote, and that India had to fulfill certain conditions in order to get more aid. At first, Johnson put off any decision, then, in August, he only approved a two-months supply, which marked the beginning of the "short-tether" policy. However, 1965 was an unfortunate year for India, for the failure of the monsoon caused a severe drought. The U.S. was the only country that could provide the grains needed, but Johnson continued to approve only the shipment of one or two months supply at a time until early December, when the Indian government announced that it would change its agricultural policy. In March 1966, Indira Gandhi visited Washington, and Johnson sent a message to Congress, asking for additional aid to be sent to India as part of an international effort, requiring the participation of other countries; in April, Congress approved this aid.

In the following summer, the monsoon failed again and India faced another year of drought. In spite of the severe situation, Johnson refused to ease the pressure and continued with an even tighter "short-tether" policy, also known as the "ship-to-mouth" policy, that is keeping the supply so tight that food had to move directly from the ships to the mouths of the people to avoid famine. Johnson stopped shipments in August 1966 and refused to send further aid until December 1966, after he heard the report of a team of experts he sent to India. Therefore, contrary to the recommendations of almost all of Johnson's advisers, shipments ceased entirely for four months. Fortunately, Johnson approved sending new aid just in time to avert famine. In 1967, the monsoons returned and eased the situation.

2. Analysis of the "Short-Tether" Policy

The "short-tether" policy was adopted by President Johnson against the advice of many of his advisers. He showed great personal involvement, but he

did not explain his motivation to those working with him. Lyndon Johnson confesses that he "stood almost alone" and that "this was one of the most difficult and lonely struggles of [his] Presidency"^{11[11]}. Chester Bowles, the U.S. ambassador to India at the time, failed to understand the President's attitude and defines it the "enigma of Lyndon Baines Johnson", for "his actions and state of mind remain a puzzle" to him^{12[12]}.

There are several factors involved in this policy, which caused much discussion among U.S. officials. I will first consider the objectives stated by the Johnson Administration, then I will take into account the role of other, apparently less related, factors, such as U.S. domestic issues and the Vietnam and Kashmir Wars. Finally, I will evaluate the results in order to be able to assess the success of this policy.

2.1. Objectives

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The "short-tether" policy had two main objectives: at the beginning, it was intended to force the Indian government to give priority to agriculture and raise its food production, while the later objective was to have India obtain aid from other countries. Johnson expressed the two principles of self-help and sharing the burden in his messages to Congress in February 10, 1966 and in March 30, 1966.

The first objective regards Indian agricultural performance. The Johnson Administration introduced a new concept in the food aid policy, referred to as "self-help", that is aid recipients should make an effort to guarantee that they will not remain perpetually dependent on American aid. In practice, India and other countries should adopt measures proven elsewhere, for instance in the U.S., to have raised productivity. When needed, the U.S. should exert pressure to ensure the implementation of reforms.

The large amount of aid sent to India concerned Lyndon Johnson even before the severe drought of 1965-67. In 1964, he asked for a review of PL 480 towards India, which was the largest single recipient. This study determined that India had not done enough to increase its food production and was too dependent on American food aid. Therefore, these critics suggested that a significant change in Indian policy should be the price of aid.

Theoretically, India should have already become self-sufficient in food production a decade earlier, for aid planners had devised a program to solve this

^{11[11]} Johnson, Lyndon B. *The Vantage Point*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971. p.225

^{12[12]} Bowles, Chester. *Promises To Keep: My Years in Public Life, 1941-1969*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971. p.532, 534

problem. In fact, the First Five-Year Plan of 1951, an aid program for economic development, considered agricultural production as its first priority. According to this plan, India should have achieved self-sufficiency by 1955-56, at the end of the plan period. Afterwards, it was assumed that food production was no longer a problem, so the Second Five-Year Plan focused on industrialization.^{13[13]}

However, the expected results did not come and Indian agriculture was still in great need for improvement. In April 1964, Freeman reported the discrepancy between the targets and the interim results of India's Third Five-Year Plan. He concluded that India had to give a much higher priority to agriculture in order to achieve significant progress. Freeman also indicated specific actions that India should take: increase fertilizer production, expand incentives for increased food production, increase acreage under irrigation and improve its overall economic performance. U.S. officials agreed on these objectives, but there was an important debate regarding the actions the U.S. should take to ensure that India would reach them. The Department of Agriculture, including Orville Freeman, argued that President Johnson should use PL 480 "as a lever" to improve India's performance, that is food aid must be contingent to specific actions that are essential in order to increase food production. President Johnson preferred this approach to the continuation of the usual long-term agreements favored by the Department of State and by Ambassador Bowles.^{14[14]}

PL 480 was a program that could be used as a leverage quite easily, since it gave the president great power, by requiring him to make periodic judgments of the progress the recipients were making to lessen their dependence on donated food. This program allowed short-term decisions and could be suspended by the president. In addition to this, PL 480 was administered by the Department of Agriculture, with which Johnson felt much more comfortable than with the Department of State. Therefore, it provided the opportunity of accomplishing foreign policy goals, without having to deal with the foreign-policy establishment he mistrusted.^{15[15]}

The real problem was that India's agricultural output was poor because the policy of the Indian government deliberately neglected agriculture. Nayar^{16[16]} explains this fundamental mistake, which is also recognizable from the Indian point of view. In 1965, India could not be considered an underdeveloped country in the industrial field, since it had made important progress in the industrial sector and had even largely achieved self-sufficiency in the manufacturing of

^{13[13]} Chary, p. 105

^{14[14]} Castore, p.132-34

^{15[15]} Brands (1990), p. 117; Brands (1995), p. 140

^{16[16]} See footnote 10

equipment for its infantry. However, this emphasis on heavy industry implied a relative neglect of agriculture and threw the entire economy off balance. Most public and private investments were made in the industrial and not in the agricultural sector. Therefore, the poor results in agriculture were the consequence of the policy choices of the Indian government that neglected agriculture, rather than a failure of the rural population to modernize agriculture. Furthermore, the international environment also encouraged India to be negligent towards agriculture. PL 480 made American agricultural surpluses easily available, thus depressing local prices and reducing the incentive for farmers to increase their production. Although this program made it possible for India to pursue its strategy of heavy industry, it rendered the agricultural crisis much more serious. India did have a limited progress in agriculture, but even in normal years, with the regular monsoon rains, India's agricultural production was inadequate for a country of its size.

Nehru's strategy had been designed to raise India's living standards in the most rapid way. The Soviet model of development during the 1920s and 1930s seemed the best solution, that is investing heavily in industry in order to spur the economy as a whole and produce growth at all levels; this strategy, however, failed. Shastri, the prime minister after Nehru, understood the problem caused by the wrong strategy and focused on the agricultural sector. In 1964, he appointed a new agriculture minister, Subramaniam, former minister of steel. Subramaniam reviewed India's farm policy and proposed to introduce the incentives of the free market, as well as modern technology and techniques like those that enabled Western countries to experience agricultural revolutions. His objectives were actually very similar to those that the U.S. expected of India, and this turned out to be of fundamental importance to the results of the "short-tether" policy.

Johnson and the U.S. Congressmen were not the only ones disappointed by India's poor economic performance; other aid donors of the World Bank also demonstrated growing disillusionment. In 1965, the World Bank President George Woods sent a team of specialists to India, including the economist Bernard Bell, to review the economic situation. They concluded that India had to shift its priority to agriculture, dismantle the system of controls and licences, and devalue the rupee. Bell proposed a shorter PL 480 agreement, that is for one year instead of two years.^{17[17]}

In 1965, the State Department studied the different possibilities of U.S. assistance strategy for India, including food aid. India had become the largest

^{17[17]}Kux, p.242

aid client of the U.S. and the mixed results called for an urgent review of American assistance strategy: "To put it bluntly, is India worth a U.S. investment which has been running around \$500 million in economic and military aid, plus over \$300 million in surplus food?"^{18[18]} A close analysis of India's performance revealed that it had actually made more progress than other countries and on a per capita basis India was only the seventh aid recipient. U.S. officials concluded that "the verdict is less that India has done poorly than that it hasn't done well enough".^{19[19]} However, the State Department felt that India could reach much higher results, if it changed its policy, and that the U.S. should use the leverage of American investment to influence Indian policy. In the past, the agricultural sector could have reached a much more rapid growth rate, if more investments had been made. What worried U.S. officials was India's increasing dependence on U.S. surplus food: "we already send India 1/5th of our wheat crop...if present trends continue, India will need half our wheat crop by 1970/71".^{20[20]}

The State Department identified four options for an assistance strategy^{21[21]}: first, strategic disengagement - a policy of minimum aid; second, a political support level; third, a strategy for development (focusing on self-help); fourth, a strategy aimed at sharply accelerated growth. The first strategy would have forced changes in agricultural policy, but it would have imposed a great strain on Indian democracy and reduced U.S. influence, since the Indians may have turned to the Soviets. The second option would have kept India permanently dependent on U.S. aid. The third possibility was the most favorable, for it was intended to render India a self-sufficient democratic country, while the fourth option would have meant investing a much higher amount, at a time when Americans felt that they were already sending a great amount of aid.

Therefore, the third option seemed to be the most appropriate to adopt. It consisted in aiming at India's significant development through an "adequate amount of external aid...used to get sharply improved economic policies".^{22[22]} The idea was not new, but the method was new in the sense that the U.S. would really insist on it. The plan included sending a sufficient amount of food under PL 480 in order to stimulate a dramatic progress towards self-sufficiency. It would be presented "as a bargain in which the rate of Western aid would be directly

^{18[18]} Wile, Annadel et al. (Eds.) *The Declassified Reference System Microform Collection*. Washington, D.C.: Carrollton Press, Incorporation. (DDRS) Doc (1990) 181 -- .2622. *A United States Assistance Strategy for India*. 8 Nov. 1965.

^{19[19]} Ibid. p.6

^{20[20]} Ibid. p.7

^{21[21]} Ibid.

^{22[22]} Ibid. p.16

dependent upon Indian performance".^{23[23]} The U.S. and the consortium including other countries would continue to provide aid, but they would expect that India undertake major reforms in agricultural policy, massive family planning, progressive decontrol, and a series of political understandings (Vietnam, however, was not mentioned). The planners calculated that, with the proper policies and adequate inputs, India would be able to produce or pay for its own food within ten years; this would represent an optimum return for a larger scale investment and save the U.S. money over the longer run. Therefore, they concluded that aid to India, including food, must be effectively tied to increased self-help. The U.S. had the leverage to compel the Indians to adopt certain proposed improvements "by directly bargaining future PL 480".^{24[24]} President Johnson accepted this proposal and began the "short-tether" policy in August 1965.

Johnson considered the Indian crisis in a larger context, that is as just one example of a world food problem. At that time, scholars and publicists expressed publicly their great concern about the food-population gap; some even predicted that by the end of the century there would not be enough food for the whole population of the world.^{25[25]} Johnson believed that "the world had little more than a decade to bring food supply and population growth into balance".^{26[26]} However, this balance could only be reached if countries like India changed their farm policies and significantly improved their food production. Otherwise, in a few years the productive nations would not be able to meet the food needs of a rapidly growing population in the developing countries.

The "self-help strategy" seemed to provide an adequate solution to India's food problem; unfortunately, the U.S. decided to apply it just before India became particularly vulnerable, since the monsoons failed two years in a row. The drought complicated the situation and created much more pressure; however, it also gave the U.S. extraordinary influence, since it was the only country that had the supplies available. Johnson exploited the situation in order to force India to change its farm policies; he created enormous pressure by only approving aid on a month-to-month basis and delaying his decisions until the very last possible moment. Johnson was less worried about keeping the Indians begging; he was convinced that to "rush in impulsively and try to solve the immediate problem of 10 or 20 million people by simply pouring food into their markets" would only "contribute to a much more serious problem of starvation in

^{23[23]} Ibid. p.17

^{24[24]} Ibid. p.25

^{25[25]} DDRS Doc (1990) 182 -- 2628. Saunders' report on the crisis

^{26[26]} Johnson, p. 225

later years" that will have no solution at all.^{27[27]} In a Memorandum to the President, Rusk wrote, "we intend to do what we can to help ease India's current food crisis. But we cannot keep on feeding India's growing millions indefinitely".^{28[28]} Ball asserted that "the question of providing grain should not be determined as though it were a humanitarian matter", for the real question was how the Indian government used its finite store of resources.^{29[29]}

President Johnson wished to evaluate the requirements month by month. However, it was very difficult to judge Indian progress during the severe drought, especially from Washington. Ambassador Bowles reported India's progress and the seriousness of the risk of famine, but he was frustrated by Washington's evaluation of the crisis; he stated that on several occasions the embassy's balanced analysis of the situation had been undercut by reports by people who had not been to India or only provided fragmentary information.^{30[30]} Unfortunately, the president lacked confidence in the embassy in New Delhi and its reports and considered Bowles to be excessively pro-Indian. In November 1966, Johnson sent a team of experts, along with a congressional group, to evaluate the situation. He only approved a new aid agreement after these two groups reported that the requirements were fulfilled, but food was badly needed because of the severe drought. The Johnson Administration was divided on this issue; the Agriculture Department evaluated India's progress more negatively than the State Department. For instance, Ambassador Bowles judged that India's commitment to improve agriculture in December 1965 was enough to ease the pressure, while the Agriculture Department insisted on using pressure to ensure the implementation of these reforms.

The second stated objective of the "short-tether" policy was to have India request assistance from other countries, so that they could share the burden of supporting India's plight. The fact that Johnson considered the Indian food crisis as part of a world food problem is a further explanation of his insisting that other nations send aid to India. It is part of "an incipient worldwide food deficit, a challenge to humanity as a whole that merits the sustained and serious attention of all nations".^{31[31]} Johnson was convinced that "world problems had grown far too large, too numerous, and too complicated for the United States to deal with

^{27[27]} Johnson, p. 224

^{28[28]} DDRS Doc (1990) 182 -- 2623. Memorandum for the President by Rusk, 21 March 1966.

^{29[29]} DDRS Doc (1990) 194 -- 2894. Memorandum for the President by Ball, 15 Aug., 1967.

^{30[30]} DDRS Doc (1990) 182 -- 2626. Department of State Incoming Telegram from Bowles, 8 Nov. 1966.

^{31[31]} Jain, Rajendra K. *US-South Asian Relations 1947-1982, Vol. I*. New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1983. Doc. 320 Indo-U.S. Joint Statement, 29 March, 1966.

alone", and other countries had to share the responsibility.^{32[32]} In March 1966, in a message to Congress during Gandhi's visit, Johnson declared that the U.S. would help eradicate hunger from the planet, with the cooperation of the Indians and other countries. He referred to the importance of the participation of other donors in meeting India's emergency food needs: "we will expect and press for the most energetic and compassionate action by all countries and political faiths".^{33[33]} Johnson sought to involve the World Bank and other international agencies, so that the U.S. would not have to bear the burden alone for India's food shortage.

President Johnson focused on this especially towards the end of 1966, when he was persuaded that India had met its requirements in farm-policy performance, but still needed great quantities of grain. In 1967, he went a step further and created more pressure by announcing that the U.S. would send the final three million tons of PL 480 on a matching basis, that is only when other donors provided a similar amount. In January, he sent Under Secretary of State Eugene Rostow on a global sales mission, and then insisted that the World Bank organize a Food for India Consortium to encourage other countries to participate. Since words alone had not prompted other countries to pledge a satisfactory amount of aid, the president sought a more practical way to compel other nations to share the burden. However, only few countries had grain supply, so it was decided that the others could provide assistance in other forms, which would free India's resources to buy enough food.

2.2. Impact of Domestic Factors

The food crisis threatened to devastate India; however, Johnson was also influenced by domestic factors when dealing with the Indian problem. The role of Congress was very important to him, along with the American agricultural situation and grain prices. The "short-tether" policy demonstrates that domestic issues were far more important to Johnson than foreign policy.

The fundamental difference between Kennedy and Johnson was that the latter sympathized with the complaints on foreign aid. Johnson had already experienced the foreign-aid wars of the 1950s, and he understood the skepticism of many Congressmen about sending aid to countries that "expected something for nothing", since they did not even support American diplomatic initiatives.^{34[34]}

^{32[32]} Johnson, p.223.

^{33[33]} Johnson's Message to Congress, 30 March 1966, quoted by Bowles p.524.

^{34[34]} Brands (1995), p.141

Johnson stated that he "understood and appreciated the reactions of [his] fellow Americans, including many Congressmen, who were tired of Uncle Sam carrying the main load almost everywhere by himself."^{35[35]} In 1965, the problem had become even worse, for domestic reform programs and Vietnam were already taking up most of the budget. Moreover, the Indians behaved in a "downright irritating" way, criticizing the Vietnam war, and yet "seemed to take massive U.S. aid for granted".^{36[36]}

Johnson was well aware of the growing unpopularity for foreign aid, especially for South Asia, so he chose to adopt a policy he thought Congress would approve more easily. When he appealed to Congress to approve additional aid for India, he expressed himself in an extremely persuasive way, with sentences like "let it never be said that 'bread should be so dear and flesh and blood so cheap' that we turned in indifference from her bitter need."^{37[37]} This type of sentences was particularly important in 1966, a year not favorable in Congress for foreign aid, since it was a vote loser in the autumn congressional elections, especially after Gandhi's comment in Moscow criticizing the Vietnam War. In November 1966, Johnson sent a congressional group to India to make an assessment of the situation, for he wanted to be assured that Congress would approve another large-scale food operation, and the chances were much higher if Congressmen actually heard first-hand reports of the dramatic situation from their fellow members.

Johnson always insisted on congressional approval and he actually delayed some of his decisions regarding PL 480 saying that he waited for Congress to express itself on the matter. He overemphasized his difficulties with Congress, giving the impression that he did not want to take personal responsibility for American aid sent to India. He stated that his political experience had persuaded him to have Congress with him and accept the responsibility for the aid programs.^{38[38]} Johnson was very sensitive about the comments others were making about him, and he wanted to avoid being "tagged a spendthrift on foreigners of questionable politics".^{39[39]} Nevertheless, some Americans felt that a distinction between food aid and economic aid must be made. The *New York Times* criticized Johnson, stating that food aid would not generate opposition in Congress, as economic aid.^{40[40]} Saunders, who was involved in this debate at

^{35[35]} Johnson, p.223

^{36[36]} See footnote 21

^{37[37]} Johnson p.227, Message to Congress, March 29, 1966.

^{38[38]} Johnson, p.226

^{39[39]} Johnson, p.154

^{40[40]} The *New York Times*, 22 Jan. 1967, cited by Bearth, p.266

the time, leaves the question regarding Johnson's excessive concern about congressional support open; he notes that most of his advisers were not as concerned that Congress would not support feeding starving people, so the president may just have used the opportunity to "teach the Indians a lesson about the importance of cultivating the U.S. Congress" in order to get more aid.^{41[41]}

However, there was another domestic problem that concerned the president in 1966, that is the availability of American wheat. In 1965, grain surpluses had lowered considerably, since the U.S. had shipped one-fifth of its entire wheat crop to India; President Johnson had responded by increasing acreage allotments. By that time food aid could no longer be provided with surpluses, but had to be taken from the reserves or from the latest harvest; this rendered aid more expensive and the principle of self-help even more important. In 1966, the American wheat belt suffered from a drought and it was predicted that U.S. wheat production would be below needed levels. As a consequence, wheat prices increased, rendering food aid to India even more expensive and difficult to accept. In July 1966, Freeman stated that U.S. surpluses were no longer enough to provide for all the hungry of the world; the only solution was to increase food production worldwide. The July crop report stated that the wheat supply available for PL 480 would be tight, causing fears that shipping wheat to India would have an impact on inflation in the U.S.; a later report stated that PL 480 shipments would have no effects on American grain prices. However, the lower wheat stocks worried Johnson, who still feared that sending massive amounts of wheat to India for another year would drive up bread prices. In August 1966, Johnson stopped shipments, fearing inflation on American bread prices, saying "we must hold onto all the wheat we can - send nothing unless we break an iron bound agreement by not sending."^{42[42]} In the fall of 1966, Johnson continued to refuse to approve a new PL 480 agreement, against the recommendation of almost all his advisers. At his request, the national security adviser analyzed price trends and concluded that PL 480 shipments would have "no more than a negligible effect on the cost of a loaf of bread in American supermarkets".^{43[43]} In September, Johnson asked Rostow to study wheat prices; Rostow reported that they were stable, yet this did not change Johnson's mind.

In November 1966, Ambassador Bowles sent a telegram to Washington, reminding the secretary of state that their concern for the available stocks of

^{41[41]} See footnote 21

^{42[42]} Bearth, 259

^{43[43]} Brands (1995), p.152

wheat, which would be improved by the expansion of the wheat acreage should not let them forget the priority of the desperate Indian situation: "we may have to weigh the adverse implications of such temporary reduction against the importance of keeping people alive" and avoiding the disintegration of democratic India.^{44[44]}

2.3. Kashmir and Vietnam Wars

The Kashmir War of September 1965 may have also influenced Johnson's attitude towards PL 480 for India. This war caused American disillusionment about sending any kind of aid to South Asia, as well as growing anti-American sentiments in India, which made it difficult for the Indian government to adopt policies encouraged by the U.S. The Indians spent much on arms, due to this conflict, rather than investing in the agricultural sector. Johnson never officially linked food aid to a settlement on Kashmir, but by keeping PL 480 on a month-to-month basis, against the recommendations of some of his advisers, he created more pressure to induce the Indian government to give more priority to agriculture.

The link between the Kashmir War and food aid was actually made by the Indians. At first, Indian leaders, and especially the Indian press, interpreted U.S. economic pressure as a demonstration that the U.S. supported Pakistan. However, this interpretation also came to Johnson's advantage, because it reduced attention on the PL 480 agreement; the coincidence of events minimized criticism that the U.S. was interfering in India's internal affairs, since only few people were aware of the actual economic pressure exerted on India.

The Vietnam War is believed to have had greater influence on the "short-tether" policy. India had a history of nonalignment, but the prime minister occasionally expressed disapproval of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, which the Indians considered to be a continuation of the French colonial heritage.^{45[45]} In July 1966, Gandhi visited Moscow and agreed to a joint-communiqué emphasizing the need for the U.S. to take the first step towards a cease-fire in Southeast Asia, and denouncing "aggressive actions of imperialist and other reactionary forces against Vietnam".^{46[46]} This statement obviously caused a very negative reaction in Washington. However, Gandhi did not simply want to annoy the Johnson Administration; she was facing criticism at home, for

^{44[44]} See footnote 27

^{45[45]} Chary, p.126

^{46[46]} Kux, p.254

the left was accusing her of leaning towards the United States, and she responded by criticizing Vietnam to demonstrate that she did not part for the U.S. The Indian Communist minority was worried that a silent approval of U.S. actions would have also ruined relations with the Soviet Union and pressed the government to take public position on foreign policy matters, which irritated the White House and Congress, compelling Gandhi to make comments periodically on Vietnam. She even sent Ho Chi Minh warm greetings on his seventy-seventh birthday, as a response to charges that "by accepting U.S. wheat, she had sold out to the American imperialists".^{47[47]} Gandhi's criticism was actually mild compared to that of other governments, and she believed she was acting with restraint. However, in Washington these statements were taken as an offence, regardless of Gandhi's motives for pronouncing them.

In 1965, the Indian press had already reported that Johnson's "short-tether" policy was a reaction to Prime Minister Shastri's criticism of American involvement in Vietnam. After the Moscow communiqué in July 1966, this opinion became widespread. The American press, and especially *The New York Times* also picked up this point in the fall of 1966.^{48[48]}

Indian observers, as well as some Americans, including Agriculture Secretary Freeman and Ambassador Bowles, believed that Johnson stopped PL 480 shipments in the summer of 1966 to punish Gandhi for her public stance against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Many critics go as far as to consider Johnson's "short tether" policy as the direct response to India's criticism of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, in the Moscow communiqué, while others actually state that documents give no proof of this.^{49[49]} It should be noted that those considering only Vietnam as the cause of the "short-tether" policy only consider the period after July 1966.

An important U.S. official involved in the situation, Ambassador Bowles, also believed that Vietnam was the cause of the "short-tether" policy. He claims that in 1965 a private message from friends revealed to him that Johnson did not approve a new PL 480 agreement because of his "annoyance at Shastri's criticism of [their] increasing military involvement in Vietnam".^{50[50]} Bowles reported that Washington's reaction to Gandhi's criticism in July 1966, "and particularly that of the president, was violent. Cables burned with comments about 'those ungrateful Indians' and the shipments of wheat were further delayed".^{51[51]} He also recalls

^{47[47]} Bowles, p.526

^{48[48]} *The New York Times*, 29 Nov., 1966, cited by Bearth, p.263; quoted by Bowles, p.528

^{49[49]} See introduction

^{50[50]} Bowles, p.500

^{51[51]} Bowles, p.526

that when he observed that Gandhi was only saying what U Thant and the Pope had already said, a high White House official replied "the Pope and U Thant don't need our wheat".^{52[52]} Bowles sensed that the Indians had the impression that the U.S. intended to force a change in Indian foreign policy, but this was "totally untrue".^{53[53]} He believed that Johnson felt a responsibility to save India; yet he could not understand the president's actions and concluded that the problem was Vietnam and its critics, which had become a real obsession for the president.

Castore and Bearth assert that documents do not reveal the tightening of the "short-tether" policy as a reaction to the Moscow communiqué. However, some documents imply that Vietnam was a factor that influenced Johnson. A White House report of the crisis explains that "the Moscow communiqué undoubtedly had a part in the U.S. delay regarding the PL 480 agreement".^{54[54]} Furthermore, Ball illustrates the attitude in Washington in his remark, saying that the Indians have been characteristically bloody-minded... about Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh's birthday telegram). They have certainly not earned the right to special consideration on the basis of performance^{55[55]}.

2.4. Results

The most important result is that famine was averted. In spite of all criticism of Johnsons' policy, it must be noted that the U.S. provided substantial assistance during the drought, providing food for 90 million Indians; in two years, the U.S. shipped 14 million tons of wheat to India (8 million in 1965 and 6 million in 1966), corresponding to one-fifth of the American wheat crop.^{56[56]} In 1967, the monsoons were plentiful and eased the crisis..

The first positive results of the "short-tether" policy relating to the first stated objective, self-help, already came in 1965. In fact, in late November, Freeman and Subramaniam met privately during an international meeting in Rome. The two ministers agreed on the steps India should take to boost its food production, such as greater investments in agriculture and more incentives for farmers. On November 25, they signed the Treaty of Rome, a secret document "Eyes only for the President",^{57[57]} presenting the agricultural reform program. Johnson thus succeeded in getting an Indian commitment without giving the public impression that the U.S. was putting pressure on India. Early in

^{52[52]} Ibid.

^{53[53]} Bowles, p.535

^{54[54]} DDRS Doc. (1990) 194 -- 2897 State Department Administrative History During the Johnson Administration: India's Food Crisis, 1965-67.

^{55[55]} DDRS Doc. (1990) 194 -- 2894 Memorandum for the President from Geoge Ball, 15 Aug., 1967.

^{56[56]} Kux, p.258

^{57[57]} Kux, p. 244

December, the Indian government announced its new agricultural policy and Johnson authorized the shipment of a larger amount (1.5 million ton) of wheat. India declared that it would shift its emphasis from industry to agriculture, a radical change sought not only by Washington, but also by key Indian leaders.

However, the crisis was not solved, for Johnson concentrated on the implementation of these reforms. In March 1966, Johnson succeeded in according an "economic bargain" with Gandhi, that is the U.S. would provide assistance, if India implemented reforms: emphasizing agriculture, fostering foreign investment and limiting population growth. The "short-tether" policy thus forced the green revolution in India. The new agricultural policies allowed a much higher food production in 1967, and India actually achieved self-sufficiency in food production over a decade.^{58[58]} Farmers used more fertilizer, pesticide and high-yield seeds, so that the threat of famine was no longer a problem.

Johnson's policy also succeeded, though in a more limited way, in involving other countries in assisting India. In 1966, 39 countries responded to Johnson's plea, providing the equivalent of 81 percent of the 3.5 million tons of wheat expected by Washington. However, Johnson was particularly disappointed with the contributions of France, Great Britain, and Germany.^{59[59]} In 1967, the World Bank Consortium accepted the principle that food aid was part of the Consortium's work and the ultimate goal of organizing a "concerted international action in which each nation should do its part".^{60[60]} Rostow stated that the international response was "much greater than it would otherwise have been".^{61[61]} The contribution of other countries helped the U.S. reduce its food contributions, by providing food, cash, food production resources and debt relief. In 1967, some countries, such as France, Japan, Canada and Australia, kept their aid at the levels of the previous year, but it was in part due to U.S. pressure that they were not considerably lowered.

Johnson was successful with Congress; he was able to win support for his India aid program, despite growing criticism on foreign aid. The president worked on his proposals very carefully and only presented them when he was sure that he would get Congress approval. In March 1966, he sent an eloquent food message to Congress, urging for 3.5 million tons of food aid on an emergency basis. Congress accepted his proposal and adopted a joint resolution on April 19, without turbulent discussions as in 1951. In February 1967, Johnson appealed to

^{58[58]} Kux, p.258

^{59[59]} Bearth, p.256

^{60[60]} DDRS Doc (1990) 182 -- 2627. Memorandum for the Secretary by Rostow

^{61[61]} Ibid.

Congress again, which approved easily the package of aid proposed; on April 1, the president signed it.

The "short-tether" policy achieved its formal objectives for several reasons. First, U.S. aid represented over 56 percent of all aid to India, a very significant amount.^{62[62]} Second, the drought and the threat of famine made India particularly vulnerable. The U.S. was the only possible source of cheap food and it was difficult for India to ask other countries for help, due to its internal political situation. Third, the stability of Indian internal politics allowed some change in agricultural policy. Fourth, the Indian Agriculture Minister, Subramaniam, agreed with U.S. objectives. Johnson's "short-tether" policy also had political costs, although these are difficult to calculate, for India had always been a nonaligned country that opposed foreign intervention in Southeast Asia. Gandhi seemed to move closer to the U.S.S.R., but she may have been encouraged by many factors, including the Vietnam War, the India-Pakistan War, U.S. economic and military pressure, and the prime minister's own predilections. U.S. policy required the Indian government to take actions that were politically unpopular in India, thus contributing to the pro-U.S.S.R. tendency. Furthermore, the Indians were offended because they had to undergo U.S. pressure, even though they had never misused aid, while the U.S. was not applying pressure to those, for instance Pakistan, who had misused it. India expected special treatment, rather than pressure, since it was the most populous democracy in the world.

The Indians felt national humiliation, and were forced to put "survival" before "self-respect", for Johnson kept them peripatetically begging, but they did learn the lesson that self-reliance is also important in agriculture, and not only in industry. The food crisis was so dramatic that it absolutely required a change. U.S. pressure also impelled India to adopt measures to satisfy the World Bank, such as devaluating the rupee and relaxing import restrictions, which caused much pain in India. The Indians remembered this period of suffering and blamed Johnson for it, so the cost on Indo-American relations was high. However, another long-term PL 480 without coercive measures would not have necessarily improved U.S.-Indian relations.

Conclusion

President Johnson changed the American PL 480 food aid policy towards India, which he believed had been too generous in the past, for the amounts of

^{62[62]} Castore, p.146

aid seemed to increase endlessly. In 1965-1967, for a number of reasons he applied the "short-tether" policy, approving shipments of wheat to India only on a very short-term basis. However, he never made his motivation explicit, and critics still argue about the factors, either economic or political, that rendered him so determined to stand almost alone to defend this policy.

The "short-tether" policy had two stated objectives. First, it was intended to force the Indian government to give higher priority to agriculture and boost its food production, so that it would eventually become a self-sufficient nation. The Johnson Administration realized that India's food problem was primarily caused by a fundamental mistake in the policy of the Indian government, which favored industry and neglected agriculture. Johnson introduced the concept of "self-help" and decided to use PL 480 food aid as a leverage, that is conditioning aid on the implementation of specific actions aimed at improving agricultural production. This strategy allowed the U.S. to send a reasonable amount of aid, which would gradually decrease as India would benefit from a higher agricultural output as a result of the implementation of those reforms. In a wider context, this seemed to provide the solution for the world food-population gap. However, Johnson decided to apply this policy just before the monsoons failed two years in a row. The U.S. created enormous pressure, by threatening to stop sending aid when food was very scarce, making rational food distribution impossible, and causing much pain in India. Nevertheless, the drought also rendered the situation so dramatic that India had no choice but changing its agricultural policy in order to get food from the only possible donor, the United States. Therefore, in spite of the pain, the drought actually contributed to the success of the first objective of the "short-tether" policy.

The second stated objective was to share the burden of supporting India with other countries, since this was part of a world problem which did not have to be solved by the U.S. alone. Johnson first asked the others to participate verbally and in 1967 he put more pressure by pledging part of American aid on a matching basis.

Some domestic factors also had an impact in Johnson's attitude towards India. First, he was concerned about Congress supporting him, he sympathized with criticism of large amounts foreign aid, and shaped his policy accordingly. However, sometimes he actually seemed to overemphasize his difficulties with Congress, causing criticism even among the press.

Another domestic problem was the availability of American wheat; in 1966, the grain surpluses that had always guaranteed PL 480 food shipments were considerably lower, while a drought in the American wheat belt reduced the

harvest and raised wheat prices. Johnson stopped food shipments in August 1966, fearing inflation on American bread prices, and did not change his mind when a study indicated that there would be no such effect.

The Kashmir and the Vietnam Wars also had an indirect influence on Johnson's policy. Tensions between India and Pakistan occurred just before the beginning of the "short-tether" policy and may have further convinced Johnson that it was time to end sending unconditional aid. The president, however, never linked food aid to the Kashmir conflict, while this war actually reduced attention and criticism of the PL 480 agreement. The Vietnam War, on the other hand, has often been linked to the "short-tether" policy, especially by the Indians. The Indian prime minister occasionally criticized U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and in July 1966, Gandhi agreed to a Moscow joint-communiqué denouncing the aggressive imperialist actions in Vietnam. Johnson, very sensitive about this issue, stopped food shipments in August; it is very plausible to conclude that the Moscow communiqué played a role in his decision.

Johnson's "short-tether" policy succeeded, but at a cost. It reached its first objective, for India changed its agricultural policy and implemented reforms; it experienced the green revolution, increasing its food production and becoming self-sufficient in food production over a decade. The second objective was also reached, but in a more limited way, since a number of countries provided a certain amount of assistance as a result of U.S. pressure. Furthermore, the president succeeded in winning congressional support without the turbulent discussions of 1951 (for a similar vote). However, this policy also had political costs; India seemed to move closer to the U.S.S.R. and Indo-American relations were strained.

Although the "short-tether" policy caused much pain in India, it served a useful purpose over the long run, greatly improving India's food situation both in normal years and in case of a drought. It was a "bitter medicine", as *The Economist*^{63[63]} defined it, painful but needed; an Indian critic even called it a "blessing in disguise", since its benefits were vital for India's future.

In conclusion, Johnson's "short-tether" policy was applied due to different factors, that is the stated objectives of self-help and international burden sharing, domestic issues including the role of Congress and wheat prices, and the wars in Kashmir and Vietnam. All these factors played a role and it is a great limitation to reduce this policy to a reaction to Gandhi's criticism of the Vietnam War; Vietnam did play a role, but it cannot be considered as the only cause of the whole policy, which actually began a year before Gandhi visited Moscow.

^{63[63]}The Economist, 17 Dec., 1966, cited by Bearth, p. 265

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